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## **The Global Roman Countryside: Connectivity and Community**

Robert Witcher

### **1. Introduction**

How were the rural populations of Italy integrated into the changing economic structures of the Roman period? To what extent did cities and urban populations drive change? When, where, and by whom was investment made in infrastructure? What was the impact of economic development on rural communities? Such questions about the Roman past have also been asked about other historical periods. For example, evaluating the impact of expanding capitalist economies on the integration of the agrarian empires and peasant populations of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, historians have come to contrasting conclusions.<sup>1</sup> One group has drawn attention to the evolution of a 'dual economy', whereby urban populations pulled away socially and economically from rural populations, leaving the latter isolated and stubbornly poor. Conversely, exponents of World Systems Theory have argued that it was precisely the integration of these rural communities into the industrialising economy that created their economic dependency and underdevelopment. The significance of this example is that, in trying to answer very similar questions about rural integration, historians of more recent periods with access to more and better quality data, have failed to find agreement. From the outset, this is a useful reminder of the scale of the challenge involved in the study of Roman rural integration.

Fast forward 250 years to the present. Scholars studying the industrial and heavily urbanised contemporary world have focused relatively little attention on rural economies and their integration, concentrating instead on concepts such as the 'global city'. Indeed, globalisation and rural studies have been seen as more or less mutually exclusive: cities are the drivers and loci of globalisation, while rural landscapes are the collateral damage: de-peasantisation, emigration, and environmental destruction. The policies which promote globalisation and the integration of rural communities are particularly contentious. Is more globalisation part of the solution: bringing investment, improved infrastructure, better health and education, and new market opportunities? Or is more globalisation the problem: undercutting peasant farmers, creating market dependency, stimulating rural-urban migration, and degrading the environment?

Recognition of this urban bias in globalisation studies has led a number of scholars to develop a stronger rural perspective. The present paper draws on studies which have sought to 'ruralise' the study of contemporary globalisation and explores these ideas in relation to the Roman past. The suggestion that studies of the modern world—and, especially, of globalisation—may be of value for understanding pre-modern times is controversial; but it should be noted that a number of existing studies of Roman and other pre-industrial societies have already incorporated some of the vocabulary—and even concepts—of globalisation. At

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<sup>1</sup> See Bayly (2004, 410).

the very least, then, explicit exploration of these ideas in relation to Roman rural integration may help to expose underlying assumptions; it may also identify connections between aspects of existing research, help reformulate questions, or open new avenues for investigation.

To this end, the first half of this paper explores the notion of the ‘global countryside’ as a possible approach to the rural integration in Roman Italy. The second half takes two specific social and economic themes—connectivity and community—through which to explore in greater detail how the archaeological evidence for rural integration might be reinterpreted.

## **2. The character of the ‘global countryside’**

The notion of ‘Roman globalisation’ has been around for at least a decade and a half,<sup>2</sup> and continues to gain popularity.<sup>3</sup> Some scholars have drawn loosely on the language of globalisation (including as a synonym for Romanisation); others have gone further and sought explicitly to apply the underlying theoretical concepts. Debate on this issue cannot be reviewed here, suffice to say that globalisation should not be taken as an attribute unique to the contemporary world, but rather as a series of trends—such as time-space compression, relativizing perceptions of self and others—which can be traced back into the past and which varied in scale and intensity.<sup>4</sup> There are two key advantages of a globalisation approach to the Roman past. First, it emphasises diversity. In contrast to Romanisation, which is based on an opposition of Roman vs. Other and allows for cultural change in only one direction, globalisation presumes neither a core dichotomy nor a pre-determined outcome. Second, globalisation requires a long-term and broad-scale perspective; this demands that the Roman period is understood comparatively in relation to earlier, contemporary and later societies and not as a unique historical phase.

It is crucial, however, to recognise that the characteristics associated with globalisation (e.g. time-space compression) are primarily descriptive. The challenge is to explain what causes these characteristics and their variation over time. Such explanation is also where the difference between ancient and modern globalisation lies. Morley expresses this succinctly: “The great difference between ancient and modern... lies in the driving forces of the two processes of globalisation—political unification on the one hand and economic interdependence on the other—and in the very different degrees to which the world was ‘compressed’”.<sup>5</sup> Crucially, he goes on to observe that the Roman world was not greatly ‘compressed’ by improved communications,<sup>6</sup> and that “this clearly limited the possibility of economic integration”.<sup>7</sup> Although Morley states that “Classical antiquity was a world of networks and connections”,<sup>8</sup> he is resolute that this movement of people, goods and information was not essential for life: “There was no ancient equivalent of a commodity such as oil, supplied from a limited number of locations but entirely indispensable for the workings of the world economy, and the interdependence—and vulnerability—of the system was correspondingly limited”. As a result, the Roman world was not at its most ‘globalised’

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<sup>2</sup> E.g. Witcher (2000).

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Hitchner (2008), Pitts and Versluys (2015).

<sup>4</sup> See papers in Hodos (2017)

<sup>5</sup> Morley (2007, 95).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Hitchner (2012).

<sup>7</sup> Morley (2007, 95).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 96.

economically but rather symbolically.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, as discussed below, the political and social interdependence of the Roman world still had significant economic effects.

Turning specifically to the effects of contemporary globalisation on rural landscapes, recent years have witnessed a renaissance in 'rural studies'. Periodicals such as the *Journal of Peasant Studies* have reinvented themselves (and the sub-discipline) as pertinent and political. Concerns about food security (e.g. genetic modification, land grabs) have put rural studies back on the mainstream agenda. Not least, although over 50 per cent of the world's population now lives in towns and cities, small farmers (producing primarily with family labour for their own subsistence needs) remain a substantial demographic group across Central and South America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia. There is intense debate about the social, political, and economic effects of integrating these rural communities into the contemporary global economy.

One scholar who has pulled together these diverse strands is the rural geographer Michael Woods. Through a series of influential articles, he has advanced the provocative notion of the 'global countryside'.<sup>10</sup> His aim is to counteract the emphasis of globalisation scholarship on urbanism and the 'global city' and to develop a heuristic device through which to explore how rural landscapes develop in the context of globalisation. In trying to rebalance urban and rural, he shares motivation with many recent archaeological studies, for example, in the Near East<sup>11</sup> and Mesoamerica,<sup>12</sup> as well as the Roman world.<sup>13</sup> Discussing Roman Britain, for example, Taylor argues that archaeologists continue to perpetuate an urbanocentric approach by focusing on 'familiar landscapes' which conform to prior beliefs about the expected form and effects of rural integration; consequently, 'unfamiliar landscapes', which may well have been much more common, are neglected.<sup>14</sup> As an example, archaeologists have focused on the introduction to Roman Britain of new, rectangular architectural forms rather than the continuing tradition of round houses.

The 'global countryside' is an attractive model for thinking about the character of the rural landscapes of Roman Italy, and the empire more generally. It must be stressed that exploring the Roman countryside in this way does not mean that its defining characteristics were identical to those of the contemporary world, in either form or degree; nor could any similarities be explained in the same ways. Indeed, it should be noted that the model concerns a hypothetical 'global countryside' which Woods suggests does not exist even today. Rather, the model is to be used as Woods himself intended it—as a device through which to think about the integration of rural communities in order to formulate other possible questions and explanations.

The 'global countryside' is defined by ten characteristics, collectively pointing to a further overarching trait: hybridity.<sup>15</sup> Woven through this definition of the 'global countryside' are themes already familiar from the study of Roman rural landscapes: community, connectivity, commodities and crisis. Below, each characteristic is listed (with slight modification to

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<sup>9</sup> Witcher (2000).

<sup>10</sup> Woods (2007, 2009)

<sup>11</sup> E.g. Hritz (2013).

<sup>12</sup> E.g. Robin (2013).

<sup>13</sup> E.g. McCarthy (2013).

<sup>14</sup> Taylor (2013).

<sup>15</sup> Woods (2007: 492-4)

Woods' terminology and order) and accompanied by brief comments and examples drawn from both the modern and ancient worlds.

1. **Elongation of commodity chains and increased dependency on the consumption of imported commodities.** This leads to vulnerability to global economic, political and cultural change—or 'shocks' (e.g. in fashion, finance)—which may be triggered by decisions or events far away from the localities affected.

The exchange of commodities was not fundamentally new in the Roman period. Indeed, Horden & Purcell's ecological model demands connectivity and exchange as the basis for survival in the risky Mediterranean environment.<sup>16</sup> The globalised countryside can, however, reach a tipping point: from connectivity that improves resilience to connectivity that increases vulnerability. Issues of dependency—and the opportunities and vulnerabilities it creates—are most obviously recognised in late republican and early imperial landscapes such as the *ager Cosanus* and Northern Campania where specialist production for export permitted rapid growth, followed by retrenchment—or 'boom and bust'.<sup>17</sup> Across a longer chronological scale, the rise and fall of settlement, population and economic activity in the *suburbium* of Rome represents a similar process by which rural communities became linked into longer and more complex chains of dependency but ultimately vulnerable to distant events.<sup>18</sup>

2. **Externalisation of property ownership and investment.** As property comes to be owned by non-local individuals, families and organisations, wealth is drained out of a region. In recent years, for example, some governments have bought tracts of land located in different nation states in order to secure agricultural or mineral supplies; such 'territorial grabs' have become contentious. There is resonance here with the Roman past, whether the state securing Egypt as a source of grain for the *annona* or the acquisition of land (though confiscation or purchase) for colonial settlement schemes. The effects of 'absentee landlords' on investment and wealth extraction is a perennial theme for studies of post-Hannibalic southern Italy, for example.<sup>19</sup>
3. **Social power and economy are monopolised by fewer people and institutions.** In the contemporary world, governments, financial institutions, and multinational corporations secure growing control over societies and economies. In the Roman past, such monopolisation may have been pursued by local individuals and families who found new opportunities through integration into wider social networks or, as discussed above, by external agents such as colonists and administrators. There are connections with, for example, the traditional narrative of the replacement of peasant farms by slave estates<sup>20</sup> and the growing personalisation of power in hands of the emperor.
4. **The scaling up of social and political authority beyond local reach.** In the contemporary world, this might involve international treaties or banks making decisions which affect individuals and communities around the globe but which leaves them with less agency to act. In relation to the Roman world, there is debate

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<sup>16</sup> Horden and Purcell (2000).

<sup>17</sup> Arthur (1991), Carandini et al. (2002).

<sup>18</sup> Patterson et al. (2004).

<sup>19</sup> Fentress (2005, 487).

<sup>20</sup> Hopkins (1978).

about the degree to which peasants were connected to wider political structures and therefore the degree to which they were affected by the scaling up of authority. For example, some scholars envisage peasants to have been largely unaffected by an 'epiphenomenal' empire,<sup>21</sup> while others envisage a more cognisant and savvy peasantry plugged into wider economic and political networks;<sup>22</sup> the former would have been increasingly distant from authority whereas the latter must have worked against the odds to enhance their agency.

5. **Enhanced social polarisation whereby the enterprising few have new opportunities to amass wealth but the majority do not.** Growing social inequality is high on the contemporary global agenda. In the Roman world, it is possible to see growing difference between the haves and have-nots. But there is evidence, for example from Pompeii or the *suburbium* of Rome, for increased differentiation in the 'middle' too.<sup>23</sup> Either way, wealth in the Roman world was a potent instrument of social differentiation and much of that wealth was based on the control of land.
6. **The global countryside is a supplier—and user—of migrant labour.** The connectivities and dependencies of globalisation both displace people and open up destinations for them. These migrations operate on multiple scales: from countryside to town, and from region to region. Such mobility has been well explored in relation to Roman Italy, whether as a result of colonisation and veteran settlement<sup>24</sup> or in terms of the factors pushing and pulling people to Rome (e.g. the grain dole, employment, dispossession).<sup>25</sup>
7. **The global countryside is inscribed with the marks of globalisation in the form of environmental degradation including deforestation, erosion and the expansion of pastoral landscapes.** In the contemporary world, dramatic shifts from small-scale polycultures to intensive monocultures (often producing more food on less land) lead to shifting ecologies. Valleys and coasts are often exploited intensively, while uplands are abandoned. There are echoes with the Roman past in terms of the replacement of peasant agriculture with more specialist and intensive production of oil and wine. There were also environmental impacts linked, at least partially, with the intensification of agricultural production, including erosion and flooding, the growth of deltas and silting of harbours, and changing types and distributions of vegetation.<sup>26</sup>
8. **The global countryside involves a discursive construction of Nature.** The commodification and exploitation of rural landscapes is associated with a notion of Nature as distinct from—and subject to—Culture. Both Purcell and Traina make similar assertions about Roman (elite) attitudes to Culture/Nature,<sup>27</sup> as do art historical studies, such as interpretations of the garden frescoes from the Villa of Livia.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> E.g. Terrenato (2007).

<sup>22</sup> E.g. Kron (2008); generally, Witcher (2016).

<sup>23</sup> Witcher (2008).

<sup>24</sup> Scheidel (2004).

<sup>25</sup> Erdkamp (2005), Patterson (2006).

<sup>26</sup> Walsh (2014).

<sup>27</sup> Purcell (1990), Traina (1990).

<sup>28</sup> Leach (1988).

9. **The global countryside is used less for agricultural production and increasingly as the focus of leisure and tourism.** In the contemporary world, 'inefficient' agricultural economies may be reoriented around tourism, wealthy urban-dwellers buy weekend rural retreats, and rural heritage is commodified so that urban populations may commute to 'traditional' festivals in order to connect with their extended (rural) families and the pre-urban past. Similarly, parts of the countryside around Rome were characterised by *otium* villas representing the consumption of wealth and elite leisure. Urban populations more generally might travel out of the City of Rome to visit the sanctuary of Anna Perenna or to witness the archaic rituals revived under Augustus.<sup>29</sup>
10. **The 'global countryside' is contested.** Usually, disputes over globalisation focus on immediate economic or social triggers, such as those listed above, but they draw on deeper issues of cultural identity. This is perhaps an area where there is the potential to bring together work on economic integration in the Roman world with that on Roman cultural integration.<sup>30</sup>

Woods suggests that no landscape exhibits all of these characteristics, or to the same degree, because each rural locality is defined in dialogue between local and global.<sup>31</sup> The overriding feature of the 'global countryside' is its hybrid character ; the diverse—even contradictory—effects of integration are entirely normal. The processes of social, political and economic integration do not lead to a homogenous world; rather the local redefines itself through reference to the global and bequeaths a legacy to it. Existing differences can be crystallised and exaggerated,<sup>32</sup> but the 'global countryside' is not simply the persistence of local diversity alongside pockets of development, but rather a transformation: local distinctiveness exists in the 'global countryside' but it is different from what went before.<sup>33</sup>

The integration of rural communities into the globalising economy of the Roman world is marked by diversity. Field survey demonstrates the regionalism of Roman Italy in terms of the numbers, densities, and types of sites and—just as importantly—indicates the diversity of the underlying processes which generated these differences. In urban centres, the early imperial resurgence—if not, outright invention—of local identities mirrors this situation, as communities adopted global markers such as epigraphy and monumental public buildings and used them to (re)assert their distinctiveness.<sup>34</sup> In the contemporary world, globalisation of the local is reflected by the global recognition of local distinctiveness—for example, it is only meaningful to associate generic products with certain regions or places if they have been globalised within a wider market of products and symbols, hence French wine, German beer, and Spanish ham. The association of various agricultural products with distinct provenances in Roman Italy reflects this trend; for example, apples from Signia and nuts from Praeneste.<sup>35</sup>

Superficially, the globalised world appears homogenous and the role of the state dominant. But this is a "trick of the light".<sup>36</sup> In reality, states targeted intervention strategically and in

<sup>29</sup> Torelli (1991), Witcher (2013).

<sup>30</sup> E.g. Van Dommelen and Terrenato (2007), Bowman and Wilson (2009).

<sup>31</sup> Woods (2007, 494-5).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 489.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 500.

<sup>34</sup> E.g. in the Tiber valley (Keay (2010)).

<sup>35</sup> Morley (1996, 107 and map 2).

<sup>36</sup> Bayly (2004, 31).

circumscribed situations; their power was patchy and largely delegated. The diversity of the 'global countryside'—Roman, early modern or contemporary—is not the result of the success or failure of top-down economic integration, but rather an expression of varied local dialogues. This is the micropolitics of negotiation and hybridity,<sup>37</sup> though it must always be recognised that 'negotiation' might take the form of violence and is usually conducted between groups of asymmetrical power.

The concept of dialogue also helps to address the problem of whether it is better for us to study the past top-down or bottom-up. The former may result in highly generalised models that are insensitive to local diversity, while the latter may obscure commonalities and understanding of structural connections. The 'global countryside'—the product of dialogue—works both top-down and bottom-up. It provides a general framework within which to locate multiple and varied case studies, relating similarities and differences to unique combinations of local and global interactions.

Further, once the notion of a uniform, pre-determined model of rural integration is replaced by the idea of ongoing dialogue between local and global, it is possible to identify some of the deeper issues that need to be addressed. For example, we need not only to measure and quantify integration, but also to think more profoundly about how we conceptualise it. Cultural and economic integration has often been associated with externally driven change; persistence and continuity therefore become indicative of the absence or even the failure of integration. Not only does this sort of change/continuity dichotomy oversimplify reality, it also affects explanatory frameworks. Change and integration are naturalised as inevitable 'progress', while stasis—the absence of change—requires no explanation at all. Either way, we learn little about how rural populations experienced cultural and economic integration. Even if, more recently, archaeologists have come to see long-term social and cultural stability as historically unusual, and therefore in need of special explanation,<sup>38</sup> this approach still maintains the change/continuity dichotomy and does little to help quantify and explain—not least, if change is 'normal', how is it possible to define baselines against which to measure change and how can specific drivers be identified?

Globalisation stresses continuity and change as two sides of the same coin. Globalisation's local distinctiveness is not a geographical patchwork of successful integration (change) and unsuccessful integration (continuity). It is a product of negotiation or dialogue which accommodates both. In turn, this facilitates work on a variety of inter-related explanations. Does the stability of local communities indicate stubborn traditionalism or, conversely, the success of local elites in maintaining their pre-existing social and economic status while negotiating with new external pressures? Does the absence of imported pottery—or the use of local imitations—indicate imperfect market integration or successful local innovation? Such questions illustrate the problems of understanding how to measure and interpret rural integration.

In sum, the 'global countryside' concept encourages consideration of different ways to approach the study of the integration of rural communities into the Roman economy. Reviewing these characteristics reveals several aspects on which archaeologists and ancient historians are already working, though they may not necessarily have identified connections, for example, between integration into the global economy and the role of rural identities.

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<sup>37</sup> Woods (2007, 502).

<sup>38</sup> Shanks and Tilley (1987), elaborated in a Mediterranean context by Horden and Purcell (2000).



Most importantly, the 'global countryside' provides a framework around which to locate and juxtapose the multiple models needed to accommodate the diversity documented by archaeological studies of Roman rural landscapes.

### **3. Connectivity**

With this general framework in place, the second half of this paper examines two themes—connectivity and community—which serve to illuminate some of the hypothetical characteristics of the 'global countryside' outlined above. Connectivity, through discussion of roads, colonies and ports links with the elongation of commodity chains and increased dependency on imported goods (1), externalisation of property ownership (2), and the supply and use of migrant labour (6). The theme of community links with the monopolisation of social power and economy by fewer people and institutions (3), the scaling up of social and political authority (4), and enhanced social polarisation (5).

### **Roads**

In a recent article, Hitchner discusses the role of Roman roads in regional integration and economic development;<sup>39</sup> like Laurence,<sup>40</sup> he explicitly sets discussion of the integrative power of roads in the context of globalisation.<sup>41</sup> He asks: can it be demonstrated that road infrastructure substantially increased the volume and velocity of goods and information in circulation? He raises three issues which make it difficult to connect infrastructure and economic performance in the contemporary world and hence equally if not more challenging to evaluate in the Roman past:

1. Accurately measuring goods and services;
2. Finding quantitative measures of qualitative costs and benefits;
3. And, most importantly, establishing whether investment in infrastructure drives growth or vice versa.

Faced with these problems, Hitchner settles for the likely existence of a positive relationship between roads and economic integration and growth—in other words a correlation rather than causation. As an example, he notes the territory of Roman Cillium, over 200km inland from the Tunisian coast. Here, during the second and third centuries AD, a dense network of farms collectively equipped with hundreds of oil presses was able to produce enormous surplus for export. The oil was transported to the coast via an extensive and well-made road system. But what came first: investment in the farms and presses or investment in the road network? Did roads drive growth or reflect it?<sup>42</sup>

The evidence from Italy raises similar questions. During the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC, a number of long-distance consular roads were driven through South Etruria (e.g. Viae Flaminia, Cassia, Amerina). These were integral to the establishment of military and political control over the Italian peninsula but it is difficult to associate these roads with any significant local economic growth within four or five generations of their construction if measured, for example, by increasing rural settlement density. Across South Etruria, it was not until the first century BC that settlement numbers sharply increased and rural sites began to consume

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<sup>39</sup> Hitchner (2012).

<sup>40</sup> Laurence (2012).

<sup>41</sup> See also De Haas (this volume).

<sup>42</sup> For a similar situation at Roman Thugga see De Vos (2013).

imported goods in large quantities. It was also around this time that the consular roads were paved with durable basalt surfaces.<sup>43</sup> This state investment in paving may have facilitated faster and more reliable transport to Rome, as well as providing economic stimulus through the massive scale of basalt extraction, transport and construction needed.<sup>44</sup> But these paved consular roads alone were insufficient to integrate the vast tracts of territory that lay in between them; rather, it was the transformation of these long-distance routes into a local network through the addition of (paved) interconnecting roads, or *diverticula*, which gave this state infrastructure local economic value.

It is still, however, difficult to be sure of the sequence of events. Were ridges and valleys gradually colonised by farm estates, with local roads subsequently built to integrate them into the network and to facilitate the transport of produce to market? Or were roads speculatively built to open up new areas for production? It is, of course, entirely possible that both processes were at work simultaneously. A few colonial and veteran settlement schemes aside, however, it seems implausible that the state had much involvement in such local infrastructure developments. Investment is likely to have been local—whether municipalities, private landowners, or even enterprising rural collectives.

Another indicator that the mid-republican consular roads did not open up the rural communities of South Etruria to the wider economy until centuries after their construction comes from the evidence of ‘road stations’. Examples such as Aquaviva on the Via Flaminia did not develop on the consular roads until the late republican and early imperial period.<sup>45</sup> Did increasing traffic along these roads stimulate investment in facilities at these sites? Or was investment made in order to attract travellers? Some road stations seem also to have served central-place functions (e.g. Ad Bacanas)—did these sites drive local economic development or reflect it? And who was responsible for this investment? Landowners? Freedmen? Local collectives? Or even civic elites asserting control over emergent rivals on the municipal peripheries?<sup>46</sup>

As Hitchner observes in relation to Tunisia, it is difficult to separate cause and effect and it might be better to suggest that the relationship between investment in roads, road stations and rural economic growth was recursive.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, the evidence from South Etruria suggests some nuances, including the potentially vital role of local investment in the transformation of state infrastructure. For a farmer in South Etruria, being connected to Rome by a consular road may not have been a golden opportunity in 200BC; indeed, it might have entailed disruption—exposure to passing armies and bandits, and visibility to the state. But for a farmer working the same land 200 years later, the subsequent growth of Rome’s population and the stability of the *pax romana* transformed the significance of that road link. It was now a privileged route to the largest market of the ancient world. In other words, infrastructure does not automatically integrate rural landscapes; other factors (local or global) may first have to come into effect. This long-term ‘dialogue’ of global and local is an example of the hybridised ‘global countryside’.

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<sup>43</sup> Laurence (1999).

<sup>44</sup> Black et al. (2008).

<sup>45</sup> Johnson et al. (2004), Potter et al. (1999).

<sup>46</sup> For similar settlements south of Rome—small towns, markets and road stations—which developed on the Via Appia in the Pontine Marshes, see Tol et al. (2014).

<sup>47</sup> Hitchner (2012).

But what about those areas which were not linked into this new road network? In his discussion of roads and connectivity, Hitchner also briefly observes that new connections can create new marginalities, as trade and people are drawn away from existing routes and regions leaving them more isolated.<sup>48</sup> Similarly in South Etruria, Potter argues that the bypassing of important centres (e.g. Falerii Veteres, Veii) undermined their local functions.<sup>49</sup> It is not clear, however, that such bypassing was specifically responsible for decline as many suburban towns which were incorporated into the consular road network did not prosper in this period either. Arguably, if roads were responsible, for decline it was the subsequent development of these long-distance roads into local networks—as outlined above—which allowed the metropolis to usurp the local marketing functions of suburban towns.<sup>50</sup> Further afield in Italy, we find other urban centres whose economic fortunes cannot be predicted simply on the basis of their inclusion or exclusion from new road schemes; for example, in southern Italy, Botromagno declined rapidly from the third century BC after it was connected by the Via Appia to the route from Rome to Brundisium.<sup>51</sup>

Also south of Rome, the Liri valley provides another case study. In 328 BC, the Latin colony of Fregellae was founded in the valley close to the existing *municipia* of Aquinum and Casinum;<sup>52</sup> a second colony was founded at Interamna Lirenas in 312BC.<sup>53</sup> As the military frontier subsequently advanced further into Samnium, the valley was left to develop as an agricultural territory and communications route;<sup>54</sup> the Via Latina which passes through the valley was completed around the mid-third century BC.<sup>55</sup> The colonies, however, do not appear to have developed and thrived in the same way as the pre-existing centres.<sup>56</sup> Wightman suggests one reason that the colonies failed to prosper was the later realignment of the Via Latina south-east of Aquinum, so that it bypassed the colony of Interamna and linked directly with the *municipium* of Casinum.<sup>57</sup> But cause and effect are hard to disentangle. It might equally be possible that the road was realigned because Interamna and its territory had not developed (field survey results suggest that the territory along the more direct route from Aquinum to Casinum was more densely settled by the second and first centuries BC than the territory along the alternate route via Interamna). Either way, despite the investment in the colonies, roads and land division, economic activity reverted to the pre-existing axis. On a still wider scale, despite the valley's potential as a communications route between Rome and Campania—as it is today—the route was eclipsed by the Via Appia, closer to the coast, effectively by-passing the valley as whole.

The new project at Interamna will undoubtedly shed light on these matters.<sup>58</sup> Until then, we may note the following points. First, investment in roads and rural infrastructure did not automatically or instantly integrate rural communities or stimulate economic development. Attempts to redraw local geography were not always successful or permanent. Second, integration—and marginalisation—operate at a variety of spatial scales. And, thirdly, it should

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<sup>48</sup> Hitchner (2012, 231).

<sup>49</sup> Potter (1979, 116-20).

<sup>50</sup> Morley (1996, 180).

<sup>51</sup> Small (1992, 15).

<sup>52</sup> Livy 8.22.1.

<sup>53</sup> Livy 9.28.8.

<sup>54</sup> Wightman and Hayes (1994, 35).

<sup>55</sup> Wightman (1994, 31).

<sup>56</sup> Hayes and Martini (1994, 71).

<sup>57</sup> Wightman (1994, 32).

<sup>58</sup> Bellini et al. (2014).

be recalled that many of the Roman roads of Italy simply formalised pre-existing routes; connectivity was not a new invention and is hence not a default explanation for integration.<sup>59</sup> In summary, it was not the creation of new connections that was important, but how they connected with wider networks, their intensity of use, and ongoing investment (e.g. paving, bridge-building and general maintenance). Most importantly, however, it is what and whom they connected.

## **Ports**

Port installations, like roads and road stations, also demonstrate evidence for significant investment. Was this investment intended to drive rural integration and economic development? Or did the construction of ports reflect established exchange networks and economic activity? Again, separating cause and effect is difficult. The substantial Claudian and Trajanic investment at Rome's most elaborate port facility, Portus, follows—and therefore reflects—the period of Rome's most rapid economic and demographic expansion. Portus, however, cannot be viewed in isolation and earlier investment in Puteoli and Ostia must also be taken into account. This wider system may more closely track—or even drive—the growth of Rome. In other words, as with roads, multiple scales of analysis are vital for proper assessment of cause and effect.

Further south, the foundation of the colony and port of Brundisium in 246BC seems to have radically transformed the pre-existing settlement hierarchy of south-east Italy. The colony established itself as the dominant regional economic centre by wresting control from Tarentum of links with the East Mediterranean; having lost this monopoly, the latter declined.<sup>60</sup> An important part of Brundisium's dominance was the development, in its hinterland during the second century BC, of an articulated agricultural economy, exporting surplus wine and oil to Adriatic and East Mediterranean markets.<sup>61</sup>

What were the effects on nearby areas? Small pre-existing urban centres, both inland (such as Uria) and on the coast (e.g. Mutatio Valentia), declined in size and importance;<sup>62</sup> at the same time, rural settlement in their hinterlands experienced a slight decline in numbers, though average site sizes increased suggesting rural agglomeration. One interpretation is that the strong centralising influence of Brundisium undermined the local market functions and manufacturing capacity of these towns. Regional integration into the wider Roman economy led to new agricultural regimes based on larger farms, increased efficiency, and specialisation aimed at market-oriented cash-cropping for the overseas market.<sup>63</sup> This makes for a coherent narrative. In reality, however, it is difficult to assign causation in this way. The declining fortunes of Tarentum and Uria were hardly unique in the Greek south and cycles of rural growth and decline can be traced back to at least the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>64</sup> We might therefore question whether the waxing and waning fortunes of local urban and rural landscapes would have occurred regardless of the successful foundation of Brundisium.

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<sup>59</sup> E.g. the Via Appia in southern Italy (Vinson (1972, 87)), Etruria (Frederiksen and Ward Perkins (1957, 187)).

<sup>60</sup> A similar situation followed the replacement of Neapolis by Puteoli as the premier Campanian port (Nicolet (1994, 630)).

<sup>61</sup> Aprosio (2008, 103-120), Yntema (2014).

<sup>62</sup> Boersma et al. (1991, 128-9), Yntema (1993, 195 and 210).

<sup>63</sup> Yntema (1993, 204-8).

<sup>64</sup> Burgers (1998).

Finally, it is worth looking at smaller river ports—for example, Ocriculum and Castellum Amerinum both located on the middle Tiber. Ocriculum was one of a number of Archaic centres strategically located along the river between Rome and the border with Umbria, perhaps dating back as far as the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>65</sup> By the late republican period, however, it was the only centre (with the possible exception of Seperna) left in occupation. Moreover, it had expanded to become a significant urban centre controlling the growing river trade downstream to Rome via the Porto dell'Olio. Goods included olive oil from the wider hinterland, as well as timber from the upper Tiber valley, and presumably a wide range of other products such as finewares,<sup>66</sup> millstones<sup>67</sup> and wine in Spello amphorae. But why did this Archaic site survive and prosper while the others disappeared? Key to Ocriculum's success was its good fortune to lie on the route of the Via Flaminia constructed in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. While the other Tiber centres fell out of occupation (the river was no longer a frontier), the crossing point of the Flaminia at Ocriculum provided a strategic link which sustained the settlement. With the expansion of the Rome market in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC, Ocriculum found itself in a strong position to capitalise again on its river connection—and the lack of any rivals—to greatly expand its economic role and urban infrastructure.

Castellum Amerinum was a much smaller site and developed at a previously unoccupied location.<sup>68</sup> It was positioned where the Via Amerina (built after 171BC) crossed the Tiber and, in some respects, might be equally well classified as a road station-on-a-river and hence considered alongside settlements such as Ad Bacanas or Aquaviva. The small port appears to have developed two or more generations after the road was first laid out. Here, the combination of road and river became an obvious place for a facility to provide services to both land and waterborne traffic, but its development did not immediately follow the construction of the road. It was presumably, again, the growth of the Rome market and the consequent increase in traffic which transformed the potential of the location. Whether it took speculative investment to capture that trade or investment was attracted to existing activity at the crossing point is unclear.

These two examples suggest that the development of river ports may be closely related to the road network. It was, however, wider shifts in economic environment—sometimes much later—which determined whether these newly-created river/road intersections would develop as ports. The examples discussed here stress the difficulty of isolating cause and effect and the importance of considering connectivity across spatial and chronological scales. Road building changed geographies, but not in uniform or predictable ways because roads were built with varied motives through diverse environments and social geographies. The relationships again seem to be better understood as evolving and recursive and, in turn, this helps to explain the diversity of the 'global' Roman countryside.

### ***Going off-road***

Roman roads, whether paved—or more commonly—unpaved, structured the movement of people and goods around the Italian peninsula. There were, however, other forms of mobility which are less archaeologically visible but no less significant. Importantly, *tratturi* or transhumance routes connected the mountainous interior to the coastal plains, and served to

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<sup>65</sup> Hay et al. (2013).

<sup>66</sup> E.g. from Scoppieto (Bergamini (2007)).

<sup>67</sup> E.g. via the Paglia (Antonelli et al. (2011)).

<sup>68</sup> Johnson et al. (2004).

integrate upland populations and lowland economies. Some mountainous areas appear to have been increasingly connected into the wider economy: for example, field survey at Cicolano in the mountains to the north-east of Rome has identified small amounts of *terra sigillata* (but no republican *vernice nera*). The surveyors argue that this represents the integration of this upland region via the expansion of transhumance during the imperial period.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, the upper Sangro valley to the east of Rome became an important crossroads of north-south/east-west communications, offering extensive mountain pasture and forest resources. The construction of a large 'villa' complex, located far from the nearest towns of Atina and Aufidena, suggests some central management of these resources and an inscription indicates the presence of a well-known south Italian landowning family, the Babulli.<sup>70</sup> Investment in infrastructure is also suggested by the construction of a nearby terraced roadway through the narrow gorge of the upper valley.<sup>71</sup>

In some cases, such improved routes may have provided the means to continue or even expand existing upland practices. In the Andorran Pyrenees, for example, Orengo *et al.* have suggested that the construction of a road, linking an upland area to a new urban market, served to integrate pre-existing pitch production into the wider 'globalising Roman economy' (the term used by the authors).<sup>72</sup> Such investment and integration offered upland communities the 'opportunity' to integrate. But just as on the coasts of Etruria and Campania, where wine production dramatically declined as provincial producers entered the market, such integration could bring vulnerability to events playing out elsewhere, for example a decline in the demand for pitch. A more recent parallel is the abolition of feudalism in Central Italy in 1806, which had the effect of curtailing the long-distance movement of sheep from mountains to the coastal plains, leading to dramatic shifts in economic activity in the Apennines, including a significant increase in the maximum elevation of agriculture.<sup>73</sup>

Connectivity via roads, ports and *tratturi* was a vital element of the integration of rural populations into the 'global' Roman economy—but connectivity was not a Roman invention. People, goods and animals had moved around the Italian peninsula for millennia. It is therefore important to establish whether Roman infrastructure and economic practices represent an intensification of pre-existing trends (e.g. more people become more mobile) or a more profound transformation (e.g. new kinds of mobility, connecting new places, with new effects) in order to assess more accurately the impact of the Roman economy on rural populations.

## **Communities**

As noted in the introduction, scholars of 18<sup>th</sup> century social and economic history do not agree on the interpretation of rural integration/isolation. Some argue that urban populations became richer; others argue that rural populations became poorer. Both groups assume that integration was something done (or not done) to rural populations. This conceives of integration and the drivers of change as exogenous and rural populations as passive. Certainly the confiscation and redistribution of land for Roman colonies constituted a dramatic external intervention, but it was far from the universal experience. Moreover, the

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<sup>69</sup> Barker and Grant (1991).

<sup>70</sup> CIL X, 5146.

<sup>71</sup> Kane and Witcher (2013), Lloyd *et al.* (1997).

<sup>72</sup> Orengo *et al.* (2013).

<sup>73</sup> Manzi (2012).

tendency to see rural populations as unchanging, responding only to external intervention, has been thoroughly debunked. Horden & Purcell have tackled stereotypes of 'Mediterranean countrymen' and stressed the dynamic nature of rural societies.<sup>74</sup> In reality, they rarely remained isolated or unchanged for more than a few decades.<sup>75</sup>

What role might rural communities have played in seeking or shaping their own integration? Studying the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Bayly has reasserted the centrality of demography—and specifically population growth—as a key driver of the integration of rural populations.<sup>76</sup> He argues that population has been inexplicably redacted as an explanation from economic history.<sup>77</sup> Clearly the question of whether or not the population of Roman Italy was stable, expanding or contracting at any one moment is a vexed question.<sup>78</sup> One reason that the 'size debate' has drawn so much attention is because of the significant implications in terms of the status of rural populations.<sup>79</sup> It impinges on issues such as the (im)balance of population and resources, urbanisation, migration, economic growth and changing living standards. But perhaps most important to note is that these demographic trends were largely driven by rural populations and the decisions they made about how to respond to changing population numbers. In other words, rural populations, driven by factors beyond the control of outsiders, could integrate themselves into wider economic networks, switching between 'closed' and 'open' modes as populations declined or expanded.<sup>80</sup>

Likewise, accepting the possibility that rural populations were not just producers, but also consumers has implications for integration.<sup>81</sup> In aggregate they were the largest body of potential consumers.<sup>82</sup> Of course, such potential had to be transformed into reality by aspiration for an urban- or Roman lifestyle (which was far from universal) and the resulting solutions may not have integrated rural populations into the wider economy. Indeed, de Ligt shows how villages may have emerged in response to rural demand but had the effect of inhibiting integration into larger economic networks.<sup>83</sup> Other populations will have found new possibilities via markets or—as recently suggested by the Roman Peasant Project—by linking into the wider economy through villas.<sup>84</sup> It might even be possible to argue the case for rural populations creating, in effect, small and temporary urban concentrations, such as Amiternum or Forum Novum in Sabina<sup>85</sup> in order to integrate themselves into the wider economy.

A related issue concerns the treatment of rural populations as an undifferentiated group. In reality, rural populations are usually structured as multiple and overlapping sub-groups based on clans, territories or wealth. If rural populations are permitted agency to influence their own integration, it is also necessary to allow for the possibility that there were varied and perhaps conflicting attitudes towards change. Moreover, despite the tendency to perceive rural and

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<sup>74</sup> Horden and Purcell (2000).

<sup>75</sup> See also Witcher (2007), Taylor (2013).

<sup>76</sup> Bayly (2004).

<sup>77</sup> Though archaeologists of other periods and places are actively arguing for the need to dislodge demography as the primary explanation of change, e.g. Robin (2013).

<sup>78</sup> *Inter alia* de Ligt (2012), Launaro (2011), Scheidel (2008).

<sup>79</sup> Witcher (2011).

<sup>80</sup> See Viazzo (1989).

<sup>81</sup> See De Haas (this volume).

<sup>82</sup> De Ligt (1990).

<sup>83</sup> De Ligt (1993).

<sup>84</sup> Vaccaro et al. (2013).

<sup>85</sup> Gaffney et al. (2001).

urban as opposing groups with different attitudes and lifestyles, in pre-industrial societies townsfolk tend to remain deeply embedded in rural life, and individuals and families may move back and forth seasonally or through the lifecycle. Much of the integration attributed to towns may therefore be better understood to have been effected by wider communities rather than specifically urban or rural groups.<sup>86</sup> This does not mean, however, that the distinction between urban and rural was not potentially significant—indeed, it might be deployed as a social strategy—but rather that the distinction might be better treated as a subject for investigation rather than a starting assumption.

At a general level, we can see a positive correlation between the density of early imperial towns and the density of rural settlement.<sup>87</sup> Clearly, areas with higher urban densities are likely to have stronger influence on rural integration and *vice versa*,<sup>88</sup> but as towns were highly diverse, each could impact on and integrate rural populations in different ways. Case study selection therefore profoundly affects the patterns detected. The ‘global countryside’ provides the framework needed to accommodate this patchy and diverse situation. Archaeologists have often focused on colonial landscapes—marked by clear indicators of high-level intervention and radical transformation. But to take these colonial changes as indicative of the integration of local rural communities would be perverse—they could equally be envisaged as the replacement of existing rural populations with new, ‘pre-integrated’ communities. What about other, non-colonial, contexts? Two contrasting models of rural integration illustrate some of the diversity of urban-rural relations and, in particular, the role of social and political drivers and their economic consequences.

In *Cities & landscapes*, John Patterson provides a model which connects the rural settlement of upland Samnium with the evidence for emergent towns.<sup>89</sup> Patterson argues that the key driver of events following the Social War was the Samnite elite’s aspiration to access and participate in political life in the Roman Senate. Vital to this ambition was wealth and prestige. The elite therefore turned to the only respectable and reliable source of wealth—land—and monopolised rural surpluses to fund local urban building schemes with which to demonstrate possession of appropriate cultural capital. Patterson suggests a process of estate agglomeration, pushing peasants into emergent towns and/or impoverishing them to the point of archaeological invisibility.<sup>90</sup> Here, urbanism was a local means to a global ends, but most importantly, the economic integration of rural Samnite communities was driven by the social ambitions of local elites. Although Patterson does not explore the idea, another way in which the elite could have extracted the necessary surplus would have been a shift towards pastoralism. But whether impoverishing peasants or replacing them with sheep, it is important to stress that this is not a form of structural underdevelopment as envisaged by World Systems Theory, whereby economic integration suppresses peripheral economies.<sup>91</sup> Rather, in Patterson’s model, the integration and impoverishment of rural communities is part of the dialogue between local and global, driven by the social and political ambitions of local elites. This is an example of the ‘global’ Roman countryside in action.

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<sup>86</sup> Broadly the approach of Dyson (1992).

<sup>87</sup> Mattingly and Witcher (2004).

<sup>88</sup> E.g. compare North and South Etruria, Witcher (2006).

<sup>89</sup> Heinzelmann et al. (2010); Patterson (2006).

<sup>90</sup> E.g. in the Biferno valley, rural site numbers decline, though it should be noted that the majority of abandonment concerns off-site and small domestic scatters, whereas most farms and villas continued, Lloyd (1995).

<sup>91</sup> For a recent review, see Harding (2013).



The second example concerns the *suburbium* of Rome. There are many contrasts between Samnium and the *suburbium* in terms of their social and economic organisation, including major differences in rural settlement densities, types, and distributions. Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of the early imperial rural communities of the *suburbium*, however, concerns consumption. Rural sites, including small ‘farms’, made use of a much wider range of material culture when compared to contemporary sites in Samnium, including local, regional and imported pottery, glass and marble. This material culture is not only the same as that found in local towns, but also the same as that found at Rome, indicating a single, integrated marketing system. Large sections of the rural population of the *suburbium* not only aspired to a particular form of metropolitan lifestyle, they achieved it. Across Italy, Patterson has stressed the centrality of upward social mobility, for example, the adlection of individuals into, and up through, municipal hierarchies.<sup>92</sup> Such mobility was a particular feature of the densely urbanised *suburbium* with its prominent network of freedmen who became central to the maintenance of civic vitality. In this context, the archaeological evidence from the *suburbium* might be read not simply as economic integration, but also the successful imposition and/or imitation of a type of urban lifestyle in a rural context.

How different was this from the situation in Samnium? There, by comparison, urbanism was a more recent concept and involved more direct exploitation of rural populations. In such circumstances, the differences between urban and rural populations were much more significant. Rural communities may have lacked the aspiration for urban lifestyles and/or the wealth to pay for it, but equally important the elite had a vested interest in marking out and reinforcing the difference between urban and rural. As recently suggested in the context of Roman North Africa, newly urban elites may have strong motives for restricting the supply of urban goods to rural populations.<sup>93</sup> The cultural distance between rural and urban was much greater in the new and thinly urbanised region of Samnium than in the long- and densely urbanised *suburbium*.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Many of the questions we wish to answer about the social and economic organisation of the rural landscapes of Roman Italy are reflected in studies of other historical periods and through to the present day. Without losing sight of historical specificities, it is useful to explore some of the debates and concepts from these other contexts with a view to improving our understanding of the Roman past.

It has become clear that top-down ‘grand narratives’ fail to accommodate the diversity attested by over 50 years of archaeological survey. But, conversely, a plethora of bottom-up case studies obscures wider trends and underestimates connectivity. This paper has outlined the notion of the ‘global countryside’—defined by a series of descriptive characteristics—as a framework within which to accommodate both the particularities and the generalities. The challenge then moves to explanation. Here, the examples of connectivity and community have been used to illustrate some of the issues. For example, roads may be imposed by the state, but can be repurposed for local use or rerouted back to pre-existing axes. In the process, some people (both local and external) may have found opportunities to enhance social status and wealth; others may have found themselves increasingly marginalised—socially (exploited by emergent elites or by new absentee landlords) or physically (as a new

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<sup>92</sup> Patterson (2006).

<sup>93</sup> Dossey (2010).

road in a neighbouring valley redrew the economic geography of a region). But the integration of rural communities into the expanding Roman economy need not only have been initiated by external interventions such as road building. Impetus could also come from within rural communities whether as a result of growing population (e.g. importing resources, exporting population) or the ambition of individuals and families at others' expense (e.g. promoting urbanisation, imitating elites). Given the many costs of such integration (e.g. increased dependency, external ownership of land, migration, the monopolisation of social power, social polarisation, changing agricultural strategies, etc.) we need to acknowledge the powerful forces pulling (e.g. the Roman state) and pushing (e.g. local elites) rural communities to integrate more closely. These processes played out in different ways in each locality and help to explain the socially and geographically diverse character of Roman rural integration.

In these ways, it becomes impossible to talk about 'the' Roman countryside, or to answer with certainty questions about whether or not the state or urban populations drove rural integration or whether investment in infrastructure stimulated economic development. What the 'global countryside' approach offers, however, is the opportunity to understand the Roman period in much wider spatial and longer chronological context than is usually the case. For example, to assess properly the mobility of the population of Roman Italy requires understanding of mobility in earlier and subsequent periods. Similarly, to understand whether investment in infrastructure and economic growth are causally linked, demands knowledge of long-term and macro-regional trends of population, settlement and agricultural production. In many cases, the quality of our evidence for the Roman period has caused us to neglect the less abundant and more fragmented evidence for earlier and subsequent periods against which the Roman period must be measured. Most importantly, the notion of the 'global countryside' stresses the diverse social and political motivations for the economic integration of rural communities and the importance of recognising the agency of rural communities in integrating themselves.

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